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FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION: HUMAN RIGHTS, MASS EXODUSES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Written statement submitted by the World Federation of Democratic Youth, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[28 February 1997]

GE.97-10904 (E)

1. During the period 10-17 December 1996, WFDY, together with other youth organizations and groups, organized the First International Peace Caravan to the Sudan. The Caravan, which brought 50 young delegates from all over the world together with a large number of women and youth representing the pro-democracy forces of the north of the Sudan, visited the southern war-torn parts of the country. The people of this area have been suffering the scourge of a devastating civil war since 1983, yet they are largely forgotten by the international community. Besides advocating an overall culture of peace and tolerance among the Sudanese people and expressing solidarity with the victims of war and gross violations of fundamental rights, the Caravan also aimed at promoting broader respect for fundamental rights as enshrined in the body of international human rights law.

2. Through direct discussion with the war-affected people, delegates were able to collect first-hand evidence of fundamental rights violations, in particular the right to life, in the visited areas. At rallies and public meetings, a number of subjects were addressed including the right to self-determinations, religious intolerance, economic, social and cultural rights, the eruption of slavery as a by-product of war, gender equality, women's rights, as well as youth and child rights.

3. The Caravan visited the areas of Narus, Natinga, New Kush-Heman and other areas in eastern Equatoria. All these areas are zones of military operations under the administration of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Visits were also organized to refugee and orphans' camps and to prisoner of war camps. During its stay in southern Sudan, the Caravan witnessed the indiscriminate repeated bombardment of civilian targets by government military forces. On 14 December 1996, three rockets launched by the government air force were exploded close to the site where delegates were gathered for a peace rally organized in Natinga. The bombardment caused severe damage to properties and the environment.

4. The Caravan noted with great concern the plight of the displaced and indigenous peoples of the areas visited. The difficult conditions are the direct result of the ongoing civil war in their homeland and the military siege imposed on them by the Government. Delegates were deeply shocked at the deplorable living conditions in these areas, especially with regard to security and safety, sufficient food, potable water supply, health and educational services. In short, the people of these areas are lacking the most basic necessities of a dignified life which were guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

5. The SPLM has established civil administration units to organize the daily life of the people in areas under its control. However, the system is not satisfactory and falls short of meeting the growing needs of the people. The SPLM was encouraged to take more measures for the improvement of its administrative system and ensure broader respect and promotion of fundamental rights. Humanitarian organizations and the international community at large

were called upon to extend all possible assistance in order to consolidate these efforts. The Caravan commended the SPLM for its observance of the Geneva Convention in its treatment of prisoners of war. The government army reportedly does not keep any prisoners of war.

6. Conditions of people who live in the Government-controlled areas in southern Sudan were reportedly more deplorable due to the Government's atrocities. Native people of the areas are exposed to massive abuses of fundamental rights including extrajudicial killings, rape, destruction and looting of properties, displacement and the abduction of women and children for slavery by the government army and paramilitary forces. Areas affected by the growing phenomenon of slavery in the Sudan are largely in northern Bar el-Ghazal and Upper Nile which are the regions adjacent to the northern parts of the country.

7. The situation is further aggravated by hindrances put by the Government before international relief and humanitarian organizations including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations. Humanitarian organizations require Government clearance before assuming relief operations. The Government usually issues clearances on a selective basis, after deliberately prolonged procedures, with priority given to Islamic-oriented organizations. On some occasions the United Nations-sponsored relief operation (Operation Life Line Sudan) has faced these sorts of hindrances (November, December 1995).

8. The Caravan was deeply concerned with the situation of women, children and youth the majority of whom do not know the meaning of peace during their lifetime. They are facing a plethora of acute difficulties especially in refugee camps such as the UNHCR-run Kakuma refugee camp which lacks proper medical services. Refugees used to walk long distance in search of medicine and other necessities. The Caravan resolved to launch a health brigade in order to help ease the situation. Recommendations were also made to set up a national youth structure to coordinate efforts for the improvement of the conditions of the most vulnerable segments of society. In order to empower these target groups, there is an urgent need for the consolidation of civil society structures and initiatives in the area.

9. The Caravan concluded that, despite the fact that the legacy of both the military and democratic rules in the Sudan is the decimation of social life the brutal repression of fundamental rights, the castration of democratic institutions and the imposition of pervasive, grinding and heinous poverty on the Sudanese masses, the situation in southern Sudan and other extremely underdeveloped areas such as the Nuba Mountains and the Beja Areas (eastern Sudan) is the worst and lacks safety and security. The present Government has surpassed all its predecessors in fostering these problems. The Government's Islamization and Arabization orientations added new dimensions to the conflict in a volatile multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country.

10. During a lengthy dialogue initiated between pro-democracy social and political groups from the south and north of the Sudan, the Caravan felt that to put an end to the suffering of the people in the war-affected regions of the Sudan, the civil conflict should come to a halt through democratic means which guarantee peaceful coexistence between the diverse races and cultures of

the country. A sustainable solution to the current crisis should concretely address the issue of the right to self-determination for the people of southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

Recommendations

11. The Government of the Sudan should abide by its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights treaties. It should also observe international humanitarian law in the treatment of civilians under conditions of armed conflicts.

12. The Government should put an immediate end to the civil war in the country and embark on a sincere dialogue to find a peaceful solution to the country's acute political crisis and guarantee the right to self-determination for the people of southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

13. It should end all sorts of fundamental rights violations in the war-affected zones as well as the growing phenomenon of slavery and forced conscription of youth and children.

14. We call on the international community to exercise all possible pressure on the Government of the Sudan to respect its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the international body of human rights law to which the Sudan is a party. We also call upon the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to extend all possible moral and material help and assistance to the people in the war-affected areas in the Sudan, in particular the Nuba Mountains and the Beja areas in eastern Sudan.